

Chapter One



I HAVE LEARNED THAT you cannot pick and choose what you will find when you go out to explore. Sometimes you will find beautiful things, and sometimes you will find ugly things. That is the world we live in. In South Africa, where the warm Indian Ocean meets the cold Atlantic, like a meeting of two tigers, and where the hearts of people seem both bigger and darker than anywhere else, I found both.

This journey really started seven months ago when I left Newfoundland in my twenty-five foot submarine, with Hollie and Seaweed, my dog and seagull crew. Since then, we've been across the Arctic, down and around the Pacific, over to India,

and across the Indian Ocean to Mozambique, on the south-east coast of Africa, where we were now. I had wondered if sailing the world this way would make it seem smaller, but it has been the opposite. It is impossible to describe how big our world really is, how unlike each part is from the others, and how different the animals and people are—the whales, turtles, monkeys, snakes, dolphins, polar bears, fieldworkers, Inuit, fishermen, street beggars . . . And yet, none of that prepared me for what we would discover in the seas of South Africa.

I was sitting in a barber's chair when he walked in the door. The barbershop looked like it was made of tin. It sat between an old chandlery and a dry goods store with broken windows and cobwebs across the front door. The street was dusty and unpaved, and reminded me of ghost towns in old movie westerns. The street was perched above a crooked pier in an old corner of Porto Amélia, Mozambique, and looked like it would slide into the sea if the wind ever blew here, which it didn't seem likely to do. Maybe it had once been a busy corner of town, but it appeared abandoned now. It wasn't.

I had moored the sub beneath the pier because the pier was falling apart, and I thought nobody would be in the shacks above it. But I was wrong. There was a small man with tiny curls on his head and face, like pig's hair, and he jumped to his feet as soon as I walked past his window. He held a pair

of scissors in his hand, and stabbed them at me. “air cut?” he said. He looked so hopeful.

I reached up to touch my hair. It fell down over my ears and onto my shoulder. I probably looked like a girl. I studied the old man’s face carefully. He looked honest and trustworthy. Maybe it was a good idea. “Sure! Why not?” So, I came into his shop and sat down in the first chair. “No, no,” he said. “ere!” So, I got up and followed him around the corner into a tiny room that was hanging right over the water. There was another man sleeping in the chair. The first man said something in a clicking kind of language and slapped the sleeping man’s knee. His bloodshot eyes opened wide, and he hopped out of the chair like a boy. When I sat down, the chair was warm. The first man pulled a rubber sheet off the wall and wrapped it over me. “I’d like . . .” I started to say, but he left the room. He came back with a sticky green bottle. “I’d like . . .” But the man was nodding his head as if I had already told him what I wanted, and I didn’t think he was listening anymore. He poured a little liquid into his hands and rubbed them together. It smelled like licorice and shoe polish. He stood behind me and started rubbing my scalp with his fingers. I thought that was strange but figured it was probably what they did here before they cut your hair. I settled into my chair and started to feel sleepy. That’s when he walked in the door.

Sometimes you meet someone and you know that they are bad. You don’t know how you know, you just know. That’s

what I knew about this man right away. When he came into the shop, he barked loudly at the other barber and took a seat in one of the first chairs. Though I couldn't see him, I could see the barber every time he turned around to pick up something from his table. The first thing the barber did was fill a kettle with water and put it onto a hotplate hooked up to a generator. Then he picked up a straight razor and started sharpening it with a leather belt while he waited for the kettle to boil. And all of that time, the man in the chair barked words at him I didn't understand.

As I leaned back in my chair, I tried to figure out why I didn't like the man who had come in. I didn't even know him. Partly it was because he was so loud. He didn't just talk; he shouted. Then, he was also disrespectful to the barber, even though I couldn't understand what he was saying. I could tell by the sound of his voice. The barber was a quiet and gentle man. He didn't deserve to be treated like that.

But there was something else in the stranger's energy, something darker, or violent. I could feel it, and it made me uncomfortable. He sounded like somebody who had spent all of his life in bad company. Was he a hardened criminal who had just been released from prison? Was he a pirate? I had read about the pirates of Somalia, and had seen them on TV. But they were younger than him. Some were just my age, sixteen or seventeen. He was a lot older than that. I could tell by his voice. And he had come in alone. Somali pirates travelled in packs. They cruised offshore in small boats, at-

tacked passing sailboats, yachts, and cruise ships; climbed onto freighters and tankers, took their crews hostage, and demanded ransom. They kidnapped people and held them hostage for months, even years, until they were paid millions of dollars in ransom. They killed people, disrupted the shipping industry, and cast a dark shadow over the east coast of Africa. They were making the sea an ugly place. I hated them for that.

But this was Mozambique. Somalia was over a thousand miles north. And I had made a promise to Ziegfried that I wouldn't sail within five hundred miles of it. And I hadn't. Otherwise, he would have dry-docked my sub back in India, which was his right since he had built it in the first place and was dedicated to my safety. I had promised to agree to that if he felt it was no longer safe. He was like a father to me. I had to listen to him.

When the kettle boiled, the barber poured the boiling water into a wooden bowl. He dipped a shaving brush into the bowl and lathered up a block of soap. His movements were shaky, and I wondered if he was afraid. I could understand why. The man in the chair was barking at him, and then, suddenly, he stopped. He asked him a one-word question. The barber didn't answer. Then the man burst out in English. "You weren't listening to me! You didn't understand a word I said, did you, you little *kaaaf*?" The barber's head dropped a little, and he paused for a second. The barber rubbing my head paused too. Then the other barber picked up

the brush and started lathering the man's face.

"Shave close!" warned the man, "or I'll stick you on a spindle and feed you to the sharks! Hah, hah, hah, hah, hah, hah, hah . . ." He had a heavy accent that sounded European, but I was guessing he was probably from South Africa. He kept talking. He had the sound of someone who needed to talk because he spent so much time alone at sea. Here, on the edge of nowhere, he had to be coming from the sea.

I watched the barber rinse his brush in the bowl, put it down on the table and pick up the razor. As the razor swung through the air, a big ugly hand reached out and grabbed the barber's skinny arm and squeezed it. "Now, you keep that arm good and steady if you know what's good for you, hey?" The barber behind me stopped rubbing my scalp. He reached down and picked up a pair of scissors. He didn't make a sound. Our eyes met, and for a split second we looked at each other. I wondered what he was thinking, but couldn't tell. The next thing I heard was the sound of the razor scraping the man's throat. It sounded like someone opening a strip of Velcro slowly. I saw it swing through the air again and the barber wipe it clean with a cloth.

The barber behind me started cutting my hair. It dropped onto my lap and the floor, but I wasn't really paying attention. I hoped the unfriendly man would finish first and leave. I was careful not to make a sound, and the barber cut my hair very quietly. I think he didn't want to be noticed, either. All of a sudden, the man yelled. "Ouch! You stupid . . . ! You miser-

able wretch! Watch what you're doing with that razor! You cut me again and I'll slice you into little pieces and hook you for bait! Hold your hand steady!"

I saw the razor swing back. The barber's hand was shaking. The barber behind me stopped cutting, put the scissors down and opened a drawer in the small desk beside me. He didn't make a sound. I saw a small grey handgun in the drawer. It looked like a toy. The barber dropped a face towel on top of the gun, covering it. Then he turned and smiled at me awkwardly. I forced a smile back. I wanted to get out of here.

The shave continued, and so did the man's talk. "I've been here before, to this place, a long time ago. A lot more people around then. Used to be a thriving place, when the Portuguese were here. Lots of wreck divers, mapmakers, sailors for hire, investigators . . . a lot of fancy names. Thought they were all better than me." He paused. "They were no better than me. They were just treasure hunters, too. Now they call themselves oceanographers, ecologists, environmentalists. Fancy names, aren't they? Baaaaaaah! They're no different than me." He raised his voice until he was almost shouting. "You think I'm a nobody?" Suddenly he lowered his voice to barely a whisper. "Well, I'll tell you something—you can't understand me anyway, can you?—those guys don't know a real treasure from a bag of rocks. But I do. I do because I've got one." He raised his voice again. "There! Put that in your pipe and smoke it! Hah!"

The barber dipped a face towel into the bowl, wrung it out